

MAY MUSEUM & PARK HISTORICAL NEWSLETTER

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The May Museum and Park is dedicated to preserving and interpreting Farmville area history. Ms. Tabitha M. DeVisconti, bequeathed her 19th century home with its contents, the first house in Farmville, NC, to the Town of Farmville in 1983. The Town opened the facility in 1991 as the May Museum and Park. The museum's mission is preserving, interpreting, and sharing the history of the Farmville region to foster better understanding and appreciation of the people that built and contributed to Pitt County's rural heritage.



The Christmas pineapple wreath, long a symbol of Southern hospitality and warmth, graces the front door of the May Museum.

How did the year pass so fast?! But what a fun and eventful year this has been. We hope that all who read these newsletters enjoy the fascinating local history of the May Museum and the Town of Farmville. Each issue of the newsletter will continue to have recent Museum events, Museum displays, history, old and current photos, biographies, and memorabilia. Combined, we hope these act together and highlight The May Museum, the Town of Farmville, and our shared appreciation for both. As always, anyone is invited to become a member of The Friends of the May Museum which hosts enjoyable social events in the Museum gardens throughout the year and contributes to not only Farmville's historical legacy but enjoys entertaining its social aspect as well.

The following is a list of upcoming events organized by The Friends of the May Museum and so graciously sponsored by many local businesses and neighbors. We sincerely appreciate every sponsorship and every donation. It is you that has made each year more exciting, and we are confident the best is yet to come! Thank you!

2024 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ❖ **January..... The Collection of Nutcrackers Will Remain Displayed at the Museum Until the End of the Month.**
- ❖ **February..... Museum Tours Will Be Available By Appointment Monday Through Friday - 9:30am Until 1:00pm**
- ❖ **March..... Museum Tours Will Be Available By Appointment Monday Through Friday - 9:30am Until 1:00pm**



"Last of the Summer Wine..."



Scenes from the Museum's last Thursday in the Park of 2023





The Annual Oyster Roast on Oct. 22nd was enjoyed by many loyal attendees



More Oyster Roast fun with our neighbors and friends

The May Museum Dressed for Christmas



An absolutely beautiful display of Nutcrackers lent to the Museum for the holidays from Poo Barnette's own personal collection



A festive Santa wreath accents the back entry door



The majestic halltree in the Museum front entry was all dressed out with garlands, a Victorian Santa, poinsettias, ornaments, teacups, topped with a giant red bow.



On Dec. 1 The Museum hosted The Taste of Farmville's Cookie Contest. The three judges were Amira Dixon and Hillary Eco (Pres. and V. Pres. of the H. B. Sugg Student Government Association) and the May Museum Director, Roger Kammerer.



Farmville Parks & Recreation Director, Christopher Horrigan, set up a very popular *Campfire & S'mores* booth along the sidewalk in front of the Museum.



The Eleanor White Dare Chapter, Colonial Dames of the 17th Century, had their Christmas meeting at the Museum on December 7, 2023. It was these ladies who marked the May Museum and Park with a plaque honoring Revolutionary War soldier Major Benjamin May (1737-1808) at a ceremony held on June 4, 2014.

BIOGRAPHY----Sue May DeVisconti Sheppard



Sue May DeVisconti, b. Jan. 14, 1893 in Farmville, NC, d. Nov. 17, 1946 in Farmville, NC, daughter of Lorenzo DeVisconti and Addie Gertrude May; md. on Dec. 4, 1912 in Raleigh, NC to Benjamin Streeter Sheppard, Jr., b. Oct. 27, 1883 in Greenville, NC, d. Mar. 6, 1946 in Snow Hill, NC, son of Benjamin Streeter Sheppard and Absley Ann Sidney Priscilla Carr. They were both buried in Forest Hills Cemetery, Farmville, NC.

Sue May De Visconti was born in the midst of a troubled relationship between her parents. Lorenzo DeVisconti left Adeline (Addie) May DeVisconti for Texas, with his daughter Virginia, in November 1892. Addie was pregnant at the time with her second child. On Jan. 14, 1893 in Farmville, NC, Addie gave birth to Sue May DeVisconti. Lorenzo heartily disliked the name and said he would refuse to call her by that name and would only refer to her as the "*little one*." Lorenzo continued to write Addie letters from Texas and send her money for the children. In his letters he stated that as long as she indulged in snuff and would not join him as a true wife ought to do, "*love was extinct in his heart*," though he entertained some sympathy for her as the mother of his children. Though he made a snide remark in his diary stating... "*these children will never be an ornament or a use for human society she not knowing how to train children, nor be willing to train them right*." DeVisconti said he was sorrowful about their situation but eventually began to accept it. A year later, Addie finally agreed to travel to Lorenzo in Texas, arriving in Cuero, TX on Nov. 13, 1893 with her two daughters, Tabitha and Sue May DeVisconti and son Paul Dupree. Things did not go as planned, and Addie returned to Farmville



Tabitha Marie and Sue May DeVisconti

in Morganton, NC. Unfortunately, they had no room. By August 27, 1901, Addie May DeVisconti remarried her first husband, Francis Marion Dupree. The marriage took place at the Register of Deeds office in Snow Hill, NC and was made official by J.T. Sugg. Mr. Dupree tried to get a marriage license in Pitt County, but it was denied due to Addie's mental health situation. Two days before her marriage, Addie was declared mentally ill. Two physicians forwarded her application of admission to Dorthea Dix Hospital, but before admission Addie passed away. She died November 19, 1901 in Farmville, NC. Adeline (Addie) May Dupree is buried in the family plot in Forest Hills Cemetery, Farmville, N.C.

At the time of Addie's death, Francis M. Dupree became owner of Addie's properties [the Museum] and caretaker of his son Paul C. Dupree, Tabitha DeVisconti and Sue May DeVisconti. Addie's sister, Sue May Albritton petitioned the court for custody of Addie's three children. On Nov.29, 1901 she was granted custody by the Pitt County Court and moved the three children to her home on Walnut Street behind the May House [Museum]. Addie's sister, Sue May Albritton, died in 1908. The children then went back to live with F.M. Dupree until his death in 1912.

Addie's child of interest in this biography, Sue May DeVisconti, appears to have had a good education despite the hardships in childhood. She attended St. Mary's College in Raleigh, NC from 1911-1912. On Dec. 4, 1912 at 9:30pm Sue May married Ben S. Sheppard, Jr. at Christ Church. They had previously dated while they both lived in Farmville, NC and had two or three friends in the presence of their marriage. They went on to honeymoon in Florida. Benjamin Streeter Sheppard, Jr,

with her children shortly after. Despite being separated, Addie and Lorenzo carried on a lengthy and fairly friendly correspondence over the next eight years. In 1901, Addie filed for divorce from Lorenzo DeVisconti for abandonment and received it in April term 1901 Pitt County Superior Court. Addie's mental health had been concerning to the family for quite some time. In August of 1901, the family hired F.G. James, a lawyer from Greenville, NC, to help enter Addie into Broadoaks Sanatorium



Sue May DeVisconti

grew up in Greenville, NC. He attended school at Coharie, NC from 1895-1896 and had one year of college. In 1903, he was working as a clerk for the Atlantic Coastline Railroad in Wilmington, NC.

He was living in Farmville, NC by 1910. At an aviation meet in Raleigh, NC in November of 1910, Sheppard took his first airplane ride. Following this flight was a lifelong passion for flying and planes for Ben.

After their marriage they had planned on living in Farmville, NC, but instead moved to Jacksonville, FL where Sheppard was employed as an insurance agent with the Home Life Insurance Company. By 1913, they returned to Farmville, NC from Florida. During that year, there was a large Court case concerning the lands of Addie May DeVisconti, Sue May Albritton and other family members. A large amount of property around Farmville was divided up between Tabitha DeVisconti and her sister, Sue May DeVisconti. Tabitha got the May House (the Museum) and Sue May DeVisconti got the Sue May Albritton house on Walnut Street.

On Nov. 4, 1913 in Farmville, NC, Sue May DeVisconti gave birth to their first child, Harper Donelson Sheppard. The child died on Jan. 25, 1916 and was buried in Forest Hills Cemetery, Farmville, NC. Even after their child's death, Ben and Sue carried on and tried to enjoy some things in life. In Aug. 1916, Ben S. Sheppard, Jr. was a charter member of the Farmville Chamber of Commerce and during this time they vacationed often at Seven Springs, NC and other springs in Western NC.

Ben spent several months in the Richmond, Va hospital in 1918 for an unknown ailment. He and Sue May's ill health stayed prominent throughout their lives. On July 6, 1918, Sue May gave birth to her second child, Tabitha May Sheppard. She died on Jan. 9, 1920 in Farmville, NC and was buried in Forest Hills Cemetery, Farmville, NC. While in Raleigh, NC, Sue May wrote in her diary years later *"This is the month I lost both of my babies..how my heart aches for them. I wonder will I ever be reconciled to their deaths."*

In 1920, after the deaths of their children, Ben and Sue May moved to Raleigh, NC. There, Sue May became a member of Good Shepherd Episcopal Church. In 1918, Ben and Sue May bought a two-story brick building on the east side of Main Street in Farmville, NC and it became known as "The Sheppard Building."

In July 1920, R.L. Moore, Ben S. Sheppard, Jr., and W. D. Turner (owner of the Proctor Hotel in Greenville, NC) purchased the Wright Hotel on West Martin St. in Raleigh, NC. It was a three-story, 25 room establishment,



Sheppard Building, Main St., Farmville, NC

which they operated and then sold in 1923. They had quite a lifestyle during this time and were going out several times a week to eat, going to movies, shows, and attending dances. About this time, Ben's health began to fail. He stayed in John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, MD in Aug. 1923 and for 37 days in St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, MN in Dec.-Jan. 1924. They then traveled throughout the Midwest and West, reaching California in 1926, and then returned to Raleigh, NC to start a real estate business. Ben joined the Raleigh Masonic Lodge in 1926.

Sue May and Ben had a less than ideal marriage at times. Sue May wrote in her diary "*I don't see much happiness in life for me, no God, no hope, no nothing but misery. If papa and*



Wright's Hotel Lobby, Ben and Sue are seated to the right.

brother were alive Ben would not dare treat me like he does". Sue May finally decided to leave Ben and declared they were no longer husband and wife. She would not divorce him but would no longer have relations with him. They were going to lead separate lives. Although Ben declared his innocence in any wrong doing, there was obviously trouble in their marriage.

However, through the tribulations, they still went on vacations to the Biltmore Hotel, ate at the Grove Park Inn, and would stay at "The Villa" in Beaufort, NC. They went fishing, swam, and danced the night away at times.

During one of the more difficult times in their marriage, Sue May willingly went to Morehead City to "The Cherry" hotel to help Ben out of an emotionally difficult time. She left \$4,000 in jewelry with the hotel night clerk who supposedly hid it away while she was tending to Ben. The clerk said he fell asleep and found the cash box missing in the morning. Ben and Sue May sued the clerk for theft and the case became known as the "The Diamond Mystery Case". The trial was quite a sensation in the newspapers at the time. The case went to court in 1932 but was declared a mistrial. In Feb. 1933, the case was postponed due to the illness of Sheppard. The case was docketed for March 1932 trial, but it failed to come up for settlement.

In 1933, Sue May and Ben left Raleigh and moved to Greenville, NC. Through financial hardships they still managed to make the necessary payments to keep the Sheppard Building on Main Street in Farmville, NC. By 1934, they moved back to Farmville, NC to the Sue May

Albritton house on Walnut Street. Ben had a farm one mile west of Farmville where he and others flew their planes onto.

About this time, Sheppard was an aviator and is credited with flying one of the first pouches of airmail in North Carolina. He piloted a plane from Raleigh, NC delivering the mail to a north-south air-mail plane in Greensboro, NC. After returning to Farmville, Ben confined his interests to his farming operations and property rental business. He worked as a representative of



Undated Photograph of event showing Ben S. Streeter and an Official when he delivered mail by plane from Raleigh, NC to Greensboro, NC.

Smith's Oil Burning Tobacco Curers and Eisenhour Brick Company.

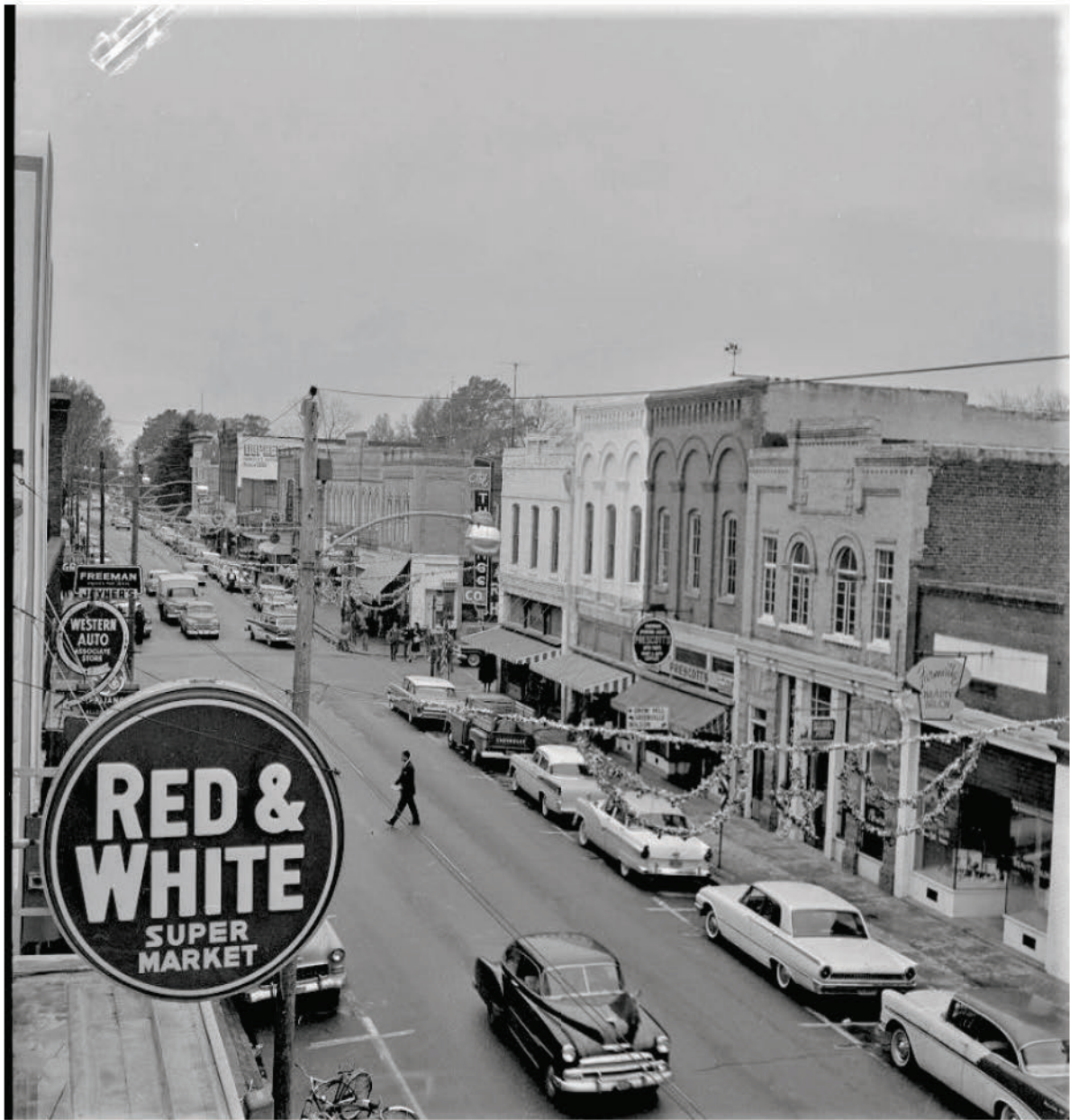
Despite his later achievements and becoming a member of the Loyal Order of Moose in Wilson, NC, Ben's health declined, and he died on Mar. 6, 1946 in Snow Hill, NC. His death was a shock to Sue May and she remained in ill health several months after his death. After declining health for several years as well, Sue May DeVisconti Sheppard died Nov. 17, 1946 from a heart attack at her home on

Walnut Street, Farmville, NC. Her funeral was held at her home, and she was buried in Forest Hills Cemetery. Even during many hardships and obstacles, Sue May DeVisconti Sheppard was identified with the activities of the Major Benjamin May Chapter of the DAR, the Farmville Literary Club, the Farmville Woman's Club, the Farmville Garden Club, the Progressive Bridge Club and the Tyson-May Reunion organization for many years, serving in varied offices and capacities. She served her community well.

In 1949, Miss Tabitha DeVisconti gave a formal gold leaf mirror to the DAR House in Farmville, NC in honor of her sister, Sue May DeVisconti Sheppard.



FARMVILLE---- Photograph



This view of Main Street looking South in late November 1960 from on top of Glenn Newton's Red & White Store. The photo found in the East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, ECU, shows the town and the stores decorated for Christmas shopping.

LAST PHOTOGRAPH



Zac Hackney and the “Ripe Revival” Mobile Market

Ripe Revival, based out of Rocky Mt., NC, serves communities in eastern North Carolina with a Mobile Market Program, where local farmers with extra produce find markets to sell in. The Program is based on a “pay what you can” model. The Farmville Food Hub, born out of the Farmville Food Task Force, brought the Ripe Revival Mobile Market to Farmville to help with food security in Farmville. Some vegetables offered are even from the Farmville Community Garden. The Mobile Market is located beside the Museum on Wednesday’s from 10:30 to noon. Zac and his wife, Caroline Fryar, an OBGYN resident at ECU, moved to Farmville in 2021.